

MEET THE PRESS

An NBC-TV Program Produced by Lawrence E. Spivak

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MODERATOR: Ned Brooks

GUEST: John A. McCone,
Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission

PANEL: Marquis Childs, St. Louis Post Dispatch
Peter Hackes, NBC News
Arthur Krock, New York Times
Lawrence E. Spivak, Regular Panel Member

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Grouping of Questions and Answers by Subjects

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I. NUCLEAR TEST SUSPENSION AND GENEVA TEST BAN
NEGOTIATIONS

A. Effect of U.S. Suspension of Nuclear Tests

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. McCone, on October 31, 1958, we stopped all nuclear testing. What would you say we have accomplished by halting our tests?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, we have engaged in a very intense negotiation with the Soviets and the British in an endeavor to reach agreement on the suspension of tests with proper controls. The results of that effort have been disappointing to date.

MR. SPIVAK: When I say "accomplished," have we eased world tension, have we added to the security of the free world

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or have we added to our own security? Have we lessened the chances of war?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I don't think we have done any of those things, Mr. Spivak. I think had we been successful we would have started on a road of better understanding that might have lessened the chances of war, but being unsuccessful, I don't think we have accomplished any of those objectives.

MR. SPIVAK: There has been no gain then in your judgment for either the United States or the free world?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Quite to the contrary I think there might have been harm.

MR. SPIVAK: Now when you were on this program about a year ago, I think it was on November 22, 1959, you said that we ought to start testing shortly after December 31 of '59 if we didn't come to some agreement with the Soviet that we should accept.

CHARIMAN MC CONE: That is correct. My words, as I recall them, were that I would extend it only on a week-by-week basis.

MR. SPIVAK: Now we have extended it again for over a year. Why? Who is responsible for that?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: It has been a decision of the Administration and it is understandable in the light of events as they evolved throughout the year.

MR. SPIVAK: Well, why has the President done that in the face of advice from people like you and some of his military advisors?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, he had to balance advice from me and from military advisors with advice he received from others and make a determination as to what he felt was in the best interests of the country with all risks involved. You will remember that through the year there was a summit conference, there were a number of technical conferences and there were various events that took place, each of which gave some thread of hope that a successful negotiation might be accomplished.

B. Are the Soviets Conducting Nuclear Tests?

MR. SPIVAK: Would you say that during those two years our security has been damaged in any way?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I think so. I think so. For the reason that we have no knowledge of what the Soviets have been doing and without knowledge they may have been testing, we do not know. We have no means of determining whether they have been testing or not and if they have been testing -- and I feel that it is very possible that they have been -- then they have made advances that we have not made.

MR. CHILDS: Mr. McCone, you have made your views very clear again and again that you think that this moratorium

on testing is very dangerous and your belief that the Russians are secretly testing.

Now a distinguished scientist, Dr. Hans Bethe, who was a member of President Eisenhower's Scientific Advisory Board and a pioneer in the atomic bomb takes the opposite view, and I would like to read you a quotation from a recent article of his.

"Having participated in the negotiations with the Russian scientists in Geneva on three occasions, I believe they are sincere in wanting a test cessation agreement and do not intend to cheat on it."

Now that view was so much the opposite of yours, do you think he was taken in by the Russians, or how did he arrive at it?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, I don't know how he arrived at it. There are a great many people who have that view, and have so expressed it. Scientists and also others.

I happen to believe -- I have studied their weapons development. I can see what improvements they can make by testing. I know that underground testing is very cheap and can be done in a clandestine manner. I know there is no possibility of detecting because we have no instruments that can detect and identify underground explosions that are carried out in the Siberian heartland of Russia, and therefore I assume they are taking advantage of the situation that they have in hand and are proceeding with their weapons development.

MR. CHILDS: Do you think they are doing this now,
Mr. McCone?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I think so. That is my opinion.

MR. CHILDS: Is there any proof of that?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, there is no proof of that, but
there can be no proof because there is no way of proving.

MR. CHILDS: And in the same article Dr. Bethe says
we today in the United States are very far ahead of the
Russians in the development of small atomic weapons. Is that
correct, in your opinion?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I have no way of knowing, nor do I
know how he knows. I do know we have made advances, we have
developed small atomic weapons. That is well known, and they
are for tactical uses and for air defense and for other uses.

We know nothing of their developments whatsoever.

MR. CHILDS: We don't have any intelligence on that
at all?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, we have no information on that.

MR. CHILDS: The point he makes from this supposition --
if it is that, apparently -- is that to resume testing would
enable them to catch up in the small weapons field. You
wouldn't agree with that?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, I wouldn't agree with that. Of
course they would make developments just as we would make
developments. However, the developments that we can make if

we would resume testing, and underground testing -- and I want to emphasize that this I am speaking of because of the fallout problem of atmospheric testing -- the advances that we make in my opinion would be very significant and we should not forego this opportunity unless we are absolutely sure that the Soviets have stopped also, and we are not sure of that now, sir.

C. Soviet Weapons Development

MR. CHILDS: Khrushchev has said several times something about an amazing new weapon. Do you have any reason to believe that they have some revolutionary new advance, Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, I have no way to know to what he was referring. I do know his laboratories are working energetically in a great many fields because I visited them.

MR. HACKES: Mr. McCone, could this super weapon that Khrushchev has talked about be this business of carrying a bomb in a satellite, which could be touched off at the push of a button? Have we any indication that that is what it is?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: That in itself is not a weapon. That would be a weapons system.

MR. HACKES: A hydrogen bomb, I am talking about.

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: That would be a weapons system. He might be referring to something such as that. He might

be referring to a biological weapon, or something that is non-nucleonic, I do not know.

MR. SPIVAK: Could it be the neutron bomb, the death-ray bomb that they have talked a great deal about?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: It might be, although I do not think that he would refer to that in such a dramatic manner, although that would be an exceedingly important development, particularly for the tactical ground forces.

D. Problems of Inspection and Control Under a Test Cessation Treaty

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. Chairman, we have insisted from the beginning that we would not sign an agreement with the Russians that couldn't give us proper inspection and control, isn't that so?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: That is correct.

MR. SPIVAK: Now the agreement we are prepared now to sign, will that give us the protection we want? Will that give us the inspection and the control that we think necessary for proper policing?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, if we can reach agreement with the Soviets on the control system that we want and that we have proposed, and if we proceed as we have proposed with the improvements of seismic technology, then I think we will accomplish that objective, yes.

MR. SPIVAK: Well, now I am talking now specifically about -- we want I believe 21 inspection posts, I believe, and the Soviets have offered us 15, is that correct?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: That is right.

MR. SPIVAK: The West says we need 20 on-site inspections and the Soviet wants 3, is that correct?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: That is correct.

MR. SPIVAK: Will the 20 on-site inspections that we want and the 21 inspection posts be sufficient to protect us against cheating?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: The 21 inspection posts and the 20 on-site inspections would protect us in cheating in larger size underground explosions. Those are above the seismic signal of 4.75 or the equivalent of about a 20 kiloton explosion.

Now the proposal goes one step further, Mr. Spivak. It proposes a coordinated research program to improve seismology, to improve the instrumentation in these stations so that the threshold of their capability can be lowered.

MR. SPIVAK: But that number would not give us the protection we now seek?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: The number of twenty-one?

MR. SPIVAK: The number of twenty and twenty-one. Is that the number of on-site inspections and the number of inspection posts?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, it would not. The protection we seek would evolve through the seismic research which we have proposed as part of this very proposal of which you speak.

MR. SPIVAK: And this would take time.

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: It would take two or two and a half years in our opinion.

MR. SPIVAK: Can we afford to go on not testing during that period of time that is being developed?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: We propose, if agreement is reached, that these stations be installed and as they are installed they be put in operation and the system start to work and I think this is a workable plan, yes.

Now the Soviets have countered by proposing that if they do agree on the system that the whole system be installed and that nothing be done in the way of operating it until it is completed and that is four years from now and hence they would enjoy a four year unpoliced moratorium and that would be unacceptable to us.

MR. KROCK: Now let's assume that the horse hasn't gotten out of the stable yet and that before we finish the negotiations that we can get a treaty. That is a very wild assumption from my standpoint because I don't think the Russians would want one and it seems to me if I was in their position I would rather negotiate than act. Negotiation in this case being the very enemy of action.

Suppose we get a treaty, however, and it has all these various inspection arrangements and of course we never would have a treaty unless they thought it was to their advantage to have this treaty. Otherwise how could we have one.

All right, we have one that they find in their advantage and we all sign up. And then the Russians decide it is to their advantage to violate this treaty and that if they are caught the consequences would be far less important to them than the advantage they get by the cheating.

What sanctions possibly could they fear, or to the free world apply or the rest of the signatories apply if that was their procedure?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, I would think that the only sanctions that could be applied would be the -- it would mean the end of the treaty, and the parties to the treaty would be free to proceed on their own. I don't see how there could be any other sanction.

E. Should the U.S. Resume Nuclear Tests?

MR. SPIVAK: What do you personally think will contribute more to the security of the United States and the free world, a nuclear test ban which we seem ready to sign, or a resumption of underground testing and testing in outer space on our part?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, that is a difficult question, Mr. Spivak. I think that the resumption of underground testing

and outer space testing would probably contribute more to the security of the free world because it will advance this technology.

On the other hand, an agreement might contribute greatly to relieving tension and it might pave the way to agreements in more important areas of disarmament, and that is the hope that lies behind this undertaking.

MR. KROCK: On the point of the time of the moratorium, Mr. Chairman, it has gone on now for almost two years, hasn't it, or perhaps a little more than two years?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: A little more than that, sir.

MR. KROCK: And I suppose you can assume that if the administration did not end the moratorium by this time that it could naturally not take a step of that magnitude affecting as it would every policy of the next administration, that we must assume that nothing from here until Mr. Kennedy becomes President will be done in this field.

That, as I understood his plan, it would involve -- perhaps he would make one more try, he says. That would involve a few more weeks or perhaps months.

Does that make any difference any more? If the Russians had been cheating, haven't they had enough time now to perfect something that would give them a great advantage already?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Yes they would have time. Of course weeks are important in my opinion. However as you say this

is an extremely important policy matter for Mr. Kennedy's administration, and he said he was going to make a good hard try to reach an agreement and I think he should be given that opportunity.

I do not think it should take him long to determine the true intentions of the Soviets because he has close to him such men as Senator Anderson and Mr. Holifield, the new chairman of the Joint Committee, Senator Gore and Senator Jackson, all who have been following this matter very closely.

MR. SPIVAK: Mr. McCone, Senator Humphrey suggested the other day that if we don't get an agreement at Geneva by June, 1961, we ought to resume testing.

Would you want to wait that long?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I don't think it is within my province to set any date for the new Administration. However, I don't think it is necessary to wait that long.

MR. SPIVAK: Well, do you think it would be wise to wait that long?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, I don't think it would be wise to wait that long.

II. ISRAELI REACTOR PROGRAM

MR. KROCK: Mr. Chairman, it seems to be fairly established now that the Israeli government has built or is building a reactor -- I am not familiar with the technical terms, but as I understand it, this is an installation that has weapons capability, is that correct? And is the statement correct in the first place, that the Israelis have built such an instrument?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: We have only informal and unofficial information on the program of the Israeli government to build a nuclear reactor. The nuclear reactor itself does not create a weapons capability. However, all nuclear reactors do breed plutonium and plutonium is a weapons material. Our information is unofficial and informal and we have asked for further information from the Israeli government.

MR. KROCK: Well, then, since you say that the weapons capability is, of course, there, it becomes a question of intent. The Israeli government, as I understand it, says they have no thought of producing weapons through this medium, or any use of plutonium for that purpose.

Would it not be a very perfect opportunity for the government of Israel, considering that it has been the beneficiary of great help from the United States government and that their contributions to the state have been made tax deductible by Americans, would it not be a remarkably fine opportunity for them to agree to be the model for an inspection system whereby the benevolence of this intent could be proved, not only to us but to the world?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Yes, that is entirely possible, Mr. Krock. A system of safeguards has been developed, it has been developed by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Each one of our bilaterals with countries, including our research bilateral with Israel provides for safeguards which

are a means of verification that the materials produced in the reactor will be used for civil rather than military purposes and this all could be installed, and this would allay fear in the minds of the people throughout the world that a country was building a reactor for the purpose of developing a weapons capability.

MR. KROCK: There is one more thing: Obviously, if we have made informal inquiries, this is a surprise to us?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Yes, it is.

MR. KROCK: It was done in secret. I don't know anything about the subject, but how could the government of Israel perfect this installation without the aid of some other nuclear power? So isn't the element of secrecy a rather astonishing thing in the circumstances,, and what could that power be that rendered the assistance that it seems to me was required?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, there are a number of countries that might have rendered assistance, if a country indeed did render assistance, and we really do not know enough about it to say what assistance, if any, was rendered.

MR. KROCK: So it was done secretly?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: The development was not revealed to us. We did not know about it until we learned about it informally and unofficially, very recently.

III. NUCLEAR ARMAMENTS FOR NATO

MR. HACKES: Mr. McCone, you have just returned from a trip to Europe, including a visit to General Norstad who is the NATO Military Chief.

In your opinion should -- as there is great pressure apparently now -- should the United States be called on to set up NATO as a nuclear power and if so, under what provisos or restrictions, if any?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, there are restrictions under the law that provide that nuclear weapons supplied by us must be under our custody and control. Actually the situation is that we are dependent upon the forces of the NATO Alliance to defend the free world and they are going to do that with both nuclear and conventional weapons. And some means must be developed so that those forces, the nuclear forces, can respond if called upon to respond against a monolithic enemy that can strike almost instantly. This is General Norstad's problem.

MR. HACKES: Couldn't we accomplish the same thing by maintaining the setup as it now stands with Britain and the United States in control of whatever nuclear weapons are needed by NATO? Why does NATO have to have its own strike force?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, NATO is an assembly of 15 independent countries, each of which face the Soviet threat and therefore each must have a voice in its own defense.

MR. HACKES: Won't this plan strike a rather sensitive nerve in Congress when the session begins in January?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, I can't forecast the attitude of Congress. I think Congress when they realize the problem will take such steps as are necessary to insure the proper defense of the free world.

IV. APPOINTMENT OF NEW AEC CHAIRMAN

MR. CHILDS: You have indicated, Mr. McCone, that you are going to stay on the Commission after January 20 although you will not be Chairman because that falls within the purview of the new President to name a Chairman. Now I would like to have --

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I have not indicated that.

MR. CHILDS: I thought in your last interview in the U.S. News and World Report, you said you --

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, I don't think that question was asked.

MR. CHILDS: Well, I thought you indicated you would -- are you going to stay on?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, I do not intend to stay on the Commission after January 20. I think that President-elect Kennedy should appoint his new Chairman and I think at that time I intend to return to private life.

MR. CHILDS: I see. You could stay on as a member of the Commission, could you not, Mr. McCone?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, this seems to be the practice, that you are appointed for a term of years, and I presume I could stay on as a member of the Commission, yes.

MR. CHILDS: And yours runs until 1963?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: I think so, yes.

MR. CHILDS: Well, do you feel with your knowledge, background and experience that perhaps you have a public duty to stay on as a Commission member if not as Chairman?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, I came at President Eisenhower's request with the understanding if my services were satisfactory I would stay for the balance of his term. I told him at that time that at that time I would have to return to private life, and that is what I intend to do.

MR. CHILDS: You would not think that condition would apply to the other Commission members, only on the Chairman?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, yes. I would think it would apply more to the Chairman than to Commission members.

MR. HACKES: Mr. McCone, have you been asked to confer with anybody in the incoming Kennedy Administration?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No, not at all.

MR. HACKES: Have you yourself made any overtures to discuss anything with an eye toward carrying on this transition?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: No. I pointed out to Mr. Clark Clifford shortly after the election that there was a vacancy on the Commission and that if Senator Kennedy would designate the man he wished to be Chairman there was a possibility that that man might receive an interim appointment for the intervening months and in this way the transition could be accomplished in an orderly way.

However, I think that Mr. Kennedy has been extremely busy with his Cabinet, and no suggestions have been made

MR. KROCK: What other steps have you taken to make sure you will get out of here on the 20th of January, so unlike other Republicans who are unable to part?

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, my wife is in Los Angeles opening my Pasadena home, and some of my staff are out there and an automobile has been sent West, so a few steps have been taken, Mr. Krock.

V. MCKINNEY REPORT ON ATOMS FOR PEACE PROGRAM

MR. HACKES: One of the gentlemen who has been mentioned as a possible successor to your post, Mr. Robert McKinney, has recently made a number of charges against the AEC, the main charge is that there has been some footdragging particularly in the Atoms for Peace Program, and I think he is referring mainly to the power reactor program.

How do you answer these criticisms -- and they were very strong in the Joint Committee report.

CHAIRMAN MC CONE: Well, I think that the Atoms for Peace Program has been going along very well indeed, and I think the fact that several power companies are now in active negotiation, for building large plants, nuclear plants on a competitive basis indicates that Mr. McKinney's statement is not quite right.

I have on my desk right now a proposal from one company, and expect another one from a second company, to build very large plants on a purely competitive basis, and I think that verifies that progress has been made.